Scripta Uniandrade, v. 17, n. 3 (2019)
Revista da Pós-Graduação em Letras – UNIANDRADE
Curitiba, Paraná, Brasil

OPHELIA IN WESTERN ART: AN ANALYSIS OF PICTORIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CHARACTER BEFORE MADNESS[1]

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ABSTRACT: The article essay addresses the plethora of visual images produced about Ophelia, one of the two female characters in William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, in Western Art. The article is based on the archive of 189 images of Ophelia collected during the author's doctoral research. The analyses focus on pictorial representations of Ophelia before the madness scene, providing a discussion about submissiveness, obedience, patriarchy, naivety, sexuality and sensuality.

Keywords: Ophelia. Representation. Shakespeare.

Artigo recebido em: 23 set. 2019.
Aceito em: 30 set. 2019.

[1] The present essay entails part of the analysis based on an archive of 189 images of Ophelia collected over four years for my doctoral dissertation, titled "Reminiscence of Images: Pictorial Representation of Shakespeare's Ophelia in Western Art" (2019), Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), financed in part by CAPES.

AMARAL, Marina Martins. Ophelia in Western Art: An Analysis of Pictorial Representations of the Character before Madness. *Scripta Uniandrade*, v. 17, n. 3 (2019), p. 164-191.
Curitiba, Paraná, Brasil
Data de edição: 07 dez. 2019.

OFÉLIA NA ARTE OCCIDENTAL: UMA ANÁLISE DAS REPRESENTAÇÕES PICTURAIS DA PERSONAGEM ANTES DA LOUCURA

RESUMO: O artigo aborda a abundância de imagens visuais produzidas sobre Ofélia, uma das duas personagens femininas da peça de William Shakespeare, *A tragédia de Hamlet, príncipe da Dinamarca*, na Arte Ocidental. O artigo é baseado no arquivo de 189 imagens de Ofélia coletadas durante a pesquisa de doutorado da autora. As análises topicalizam representações pictóricas de Ofélia antes da cena da loucura, oferecendo uma discussão sobre submissão, obediência, patriarcado, ingenuidade, sexualidade e sensualidade.

Palavras-chave: Ofélia. Representação. Shakespeare.

Ophelia can be considered an icon among female characters in Shakespeare's plays, as demonstrated by the impressive number of visual representations she has merited in the arts. Her popularity has grown over time, which can be attested not only by the large number of paintings and engravings depicting her in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but also by a great number of contemporary renditions. She continues to cross barriers being represented by new media and artistic materials, always updated.

The first ever *Hamlet* image documented seems to have been Jacob Tonson's, in the 1709 six-volume edition of Shakespeare, edited by an important playwright of the time, Nicholas Rowe. According to Alan Young (2002, p. 27-28), in *Hamlet and the Visual Arts, 1709-1900*, the three earliest visual representations of *Hamlet* were depictions of the "*closet scene*". However, as artists o the 1740s began to explore new subjects and visual perspectives of the play, Ophelia's first visual representations emerged in that period, setting off her visual popularity by the middle/end of the eighteenth century.

The first visual representations place Ophelia into group scenes, as *tableaux vivants*. Érika Vieira (2010, p. 7), in "Resistindo à clausura: a iconografia de Ofélia", tells us that one possible explanation for the predominance of group scenes in the beginning of the eighteenth century is the idealizing neoclassic approach to the play. As is known, neoclassical art seeks inspiration in balance and simplicity, the bases for creation in antiquity;

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its main characteristics are the illustrative and literary character, formalism and linearity, and sculptural poses, with correct anatomy and accuracy in contours.

The subsequent segment of Ophelia's visual history can be a little foggy because we cannot affirm for sure what was the character's first pictorial image. However, arguably, her first pictorial representation appears in Sir Thomas Hanmer's 1744 six-volume quarto edition of Shakespeare. There is a previous illustrated edition of Shakespeare's plays; yet, in the researched sources, none of the previous editions depict Ophelia or describe the visual material on her.

Anyhow, Hanmer's edition, published at Oxford, included thirty-six engraved plates, five designed by Hubert Gravelot and the remainder by the important English artist Francis Hayman. Therefore, according to Young (2002, p. 30), Hayman was responsible for designing a picture of "the Play Scene" to Hamner's edition of Shakespeare, adding a new subject to the visual tradition of *Hamlet* in the eighteenth century. Thus, "*The play scene from Hamlet*", painted later in 1745 by Hayman (Figure 1), can be considered Ophelia's first pictorial representation.

The painting shows Ophelia immersed in a group scene from *Hamlet.* The moment in question is act 3 scene 2, located in what appears to be the ballroom of the castle. In the scene, we can recognize a blond prince, Hamlet, wearing black and sitting on the floor next to Ophelia. The king stands in a red coat, looking surprised and maybe alarmed. Queen Gertrude, in a beige dress and dark coat, sits in the background, behind the king, watching his reaction. Polonius is behind a chair and next to the king. Ophelia, in a white dress, sits on a chair next to Hamlet and looks at the prince. Horatio is behind Ophelia's chair observing the king's behavior. Finally, on the left side of the image two actors are staging a play, while others with no character definition blend with the scene's background.

Figure 1: Francis Hayman. *The play scene from Hamlet*, 1745.

The "mouse-trap" scene or, as it became known, "the play scene", is one of the scenes in which Ophelia gains prominence in the play probably because of the offensive dialogue with Hamlet. The double-meaning conversation between Ophelia and Hamlet is one of the most uncomfortable scenes for the character and, I dare to say, for the audience as well. Given Hamlet's word games, Ophelia can demonstrate naivety, foolishness, and/or cleverness, depending on the way her lines are delivered.

Of the four earliest pictorial versions of "the play scene" painted by Francis Hayman the gathered archive has in its data only one (Figure 1), as the others have not been found. However, according to Alan Young (2002, p. 190), later in the eighteenth century, three additional artists rendered versions of "the play scene". The first was an anonymous engraving published in 1769. Two other eighteenth-century depictions were a 1770 pen and ink wash drawing by Samuel Hieronymous Grimm, now in the Folger Shakespeare Library (not available online). Also from this period, we have Daniel Chodowiecki's record of Karl Döbbelin's 1777-1778 Berlin production, entitled Die Mausfalle (The Mouse-trap – Figure 2).

The difference between Grimm's and Chodowiecki's images in relation to Ophelia is that the latter's Ophelia is sitting on a chair and prince Hamlet has his legs extended towards his mother, but his back is against Ophelia's knees at right. This is an unusual pose if compared with the other visual representations of this scene found in my research, since this one and Henry Courtney Selous's (Figure 3) are among the few that show Hamlet with his back leaning against Ophelia's knees. In Chodowieck's image, Ophelia is sitting on a chair and Hamlet is on the floor beside her. In both images, although being black and white representations, we can observe that Ophelia is portrayed with light hair and clothes, and a doll face that lacks expression.

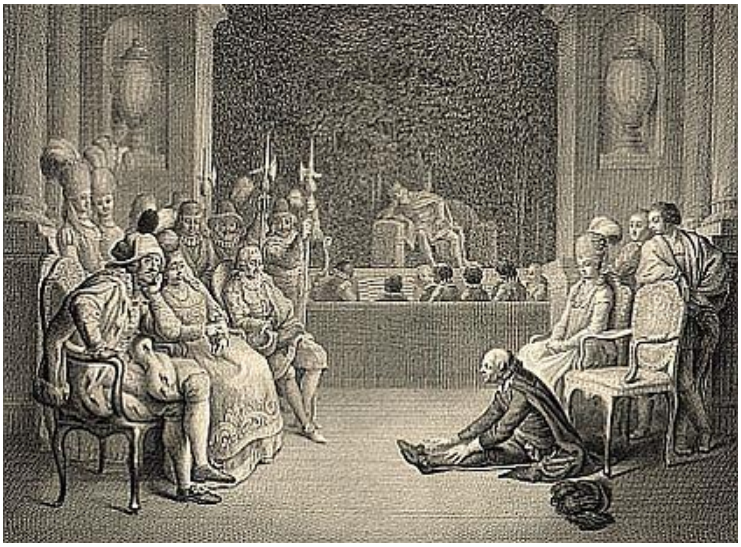

Figure 2: Daniel Chodowiecki. *Die Mausfalle*, 1777-1778.

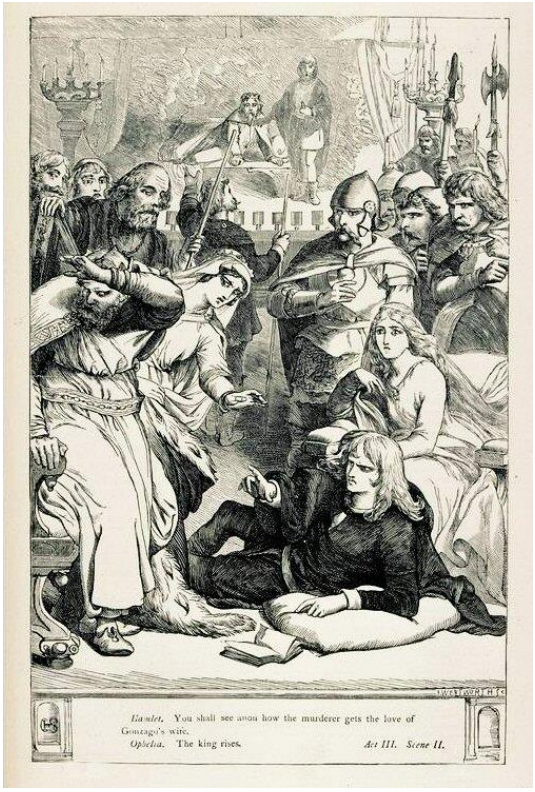

Figure 3: Henry Courtney Selous. *Untitled*, 1864/1868.

One of the most famous visual representations of the "mouse-trap scene" is Daniel Maclise's much commented oil painting "*The Play Scene in 'Hamlet'*" (Figure 4). The painting was first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1842. Almost a century after Hayman's first representation of the play scene, Maclise changed the general visual composition adopted by previous artists. The representations mentioned so far usually locate Ophelia and Hamlet on the right side of the image. However, Maclise inverts this order, placing the couple on the left side of the composition. Maclise continues the tradition of the implied symbolism of the two opposing groups of characters. On one side we have the king, Gertrude and Polonius, and on the other we have the hero and heroine, Hamlet and Ophelia, as well as Horatio.

An overall description of Maclise's image indicates a scene divided in two groups, one on the right and the other on the left. In center bottom, Hamlet's body works as a visual link between the two groups. At the back, in the middle of the composition and behind the two main groups of characters, the actors perform the play on a small stage. The staging has reached the

moment when the murderer is in the act of pouring the poison into the sleeping victim's ear. Behind the players, the shadow of the murderer's hand and the sleeping man's head are projected upon the wall, visually emphasizing the evil nature of the staged scene.

Figure 4: Daniel Maclise**.** *The Play Scene in 'Hamlet'*, 1842.

Alan Young (2002, p.197) believes that the division of the two groups creates a dramatic opposition between good and evil. Ophelia and Hamlet are identified with goodness, which is contrasted with the dark side of guilt and evil, which includes Claudius and Gertrude. This interpretation is reinforced by other details in the painting, such as the two tapestries hanging behind the audience on each side of the back wall. Despite the darkness, themes can be identified in the tapestries. For instance, the left or good side depicts the temptation and expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. And on the right or evil side, the tapestry displays the murder of Abel, a fratricide, akin to what occurs in the play.

Maclise's painting emphasizes the dichotomy of good and evil by means of the figure of Ophelia. She is highlighted in the painting, being the focal point of the piece. In spite of Ophelia not being in the center of image, nor the main character of that scene in the play, she attracts the viewer's eyes. This happens because there are two sources of light in the image: one comes from a candle lit on the stage corner that illuminates just the actors on stage; and the

other is Ophelia herself, the main source of light in the painting that illuminates the rest of the picture. Ophelia in Maclise's picture can be understood as a symbolic representation of a celestial being, or even be compared to holy representations in art. In Maclise's picture, she is shown as a figure of strength that overpowers the scene with her light. I believe that Ophelia is the main character of the Maclise's painting and, in this specific depiction, the key to Hamlet's plan. Without her, all the characters would fall into darkness, and the only thing visible in the painting would be the actors on stage; therefore, without her light Hamlet would not be able to watch his uncle's reaction.

Visually, we can suppose that Maclise seems to draw on religious paintings' references to depict Ophelia. Some of the elements used by him, her clothes, body language and physical characteristics, can be found in Middle Age and Renaissance religious paintings. In the artist's image Ophelia is dressed in white and is depicted with long, golden and loose hair. Ophelia's arms are bare from the elbow and her hands are properly resting on her lap, with delicacy and elegance. The character looks at the prince with a soft and tender expression, as if forgiving Hamlet's insults (Figure 5).

In Figures 6, 7, 8 and 9, we can see a selection of images showing the representation of the archangel Gabriel. In the details shown below, the figures painted between 1333-1513 have characteristics in common with Ophelia. The four angels are represented using a loose white gown; their physical appearance, despite the difference of time periods, is similar; they have golden, blond and loose hair; all of them have their heads or bodies making a reference, in a position of submissiveness – in this case, to Mary mother of Jesus, at the moment of Annunciation of her pregnancy.

Image 5: Daniel Maclise**.** *The Play Scene in 'Hamlet'*, 1842. (Detail)

Figure 6: Benvenuto di Giovanni. *Annunciation*, 1470. (Detail) **/** Figure 7: Simone Martini and Lipo Memmi. *The Annunciation with St. Margaret and St. Ansanus*, 1333. (Detail) **/** Figure 8: Master of Mebkirch. *Thalheimer Retable*, 1518. (Detail) / Figure 9: Sandro Botticelli. *The Annunciation*, 1485. (Detail)

Thus, similarities between the image of Ophelia and religious representations are feasible. The description of Maclise's Ophelia could be easily replaced by the description of one of the figures above. Symbolically, we can draw a parallel between the archangel Gabriel and his mission to announce the arrival of Jesus, and Ophelia in the picture of Maclise. As was

observed, in the painting she can be seen as an essential element in the revelation of the king's murder; hence, we can think that Ophelia has the role of annunciation, the annunciation of the murder in the painting and, by implication, in the play.

Maclise was not the only one to lead us on this interpretive path. The English painter Keeley Halswelle, in his 1878 representation of "The Play Scene", also conveys a holy interpretation of Ophelia. The overall composition of Halswelle's painting is different from Maclise's. Halswelle does not choose a theatrical setting, but a specifically Roman one. His conception of nineteenth-century Denmark is based on his view of seventh-century Rome. The setting thus has religious connotations, which are in keeping with the strong religious thread that runs through the play.

Figure 10: Keeley Halswelle**.** *The Play Scene*, 1878.

While Maclise places the stage at the center of the painting, with the audience on either side, Halswelle makes a bold move away from Maclise, changing the scene round, taking a more adventurous angle, which opens up the foreground to a great expanse of marble floor, and throws the figures back into the middle distance. However, Maclise seems to have been the inspiration for Halswelle in some aspects, such as Hamlet, whose position here appears to repeat Charles Kean's famous "crawl".

This specific similarity between the artists – "Kean's crawl" – is an interesting fact. Notoriously, in 1856, Lewis Carroll attended a performance of *Hamle*t at the Princess Theatre with Charles Kean playing Hamlet. Kean's

production so strongly resembled the composition of Maclise's painting of 1842 that Carroll recorded it as an obvious example of how a painter could influence an actor. However, these relationships are more complex; Maclise recorded in his painting details from a production of *Hamlet* that he had seen before. Probably we are talking about Edmund Kean, not Charles, who had introduced the "crawl" in his production of *Hamlet* in 1814.

Besides Hamlet's crawl, Halswelle's painting shows us similarities in what concerns Ophelia's depiction. Halswelle, like Maclise, represents her in a white dress, a symbol of purity, with long golden, loose hair. Ophelia is sitting on what looks like a marble bench; and at first glance, she seems to be part of a large classical sculptural group, maybe in reference to the artist's Roman inspiration; her figure blends with her broad fabric dress, the marble bench and the other two female figures behind creating a prank to the eye (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Keeley Halswelle**.** *The Play Scene*, 1878. (Detail)

As in Maclise's painting, Halswelle's light in the picture has an important interpretative role for us. The light in the image divides the scene. However, in Halswelle's the source of light is not Ophelia as observed in

Maclise's where she had her own light. Although she is not the source of light, in Halswelle's she is the one chosen to be touched by light. The natural light comes from what seems to be a huge window behind the stage. A curtain blocks half of the light causing a contrast of light and shadow in the painting. The only ones illuminated by the natural light are Ophelia and the actors on stage. Characters such as the King, the Queen, and Hamlet are all in the foreground but out of the light, in the shadow.

The pictorial legacy of the Fine Arts has undoubtedly contributed most to the imaginary about light and shadow. These two elements usually carry symbolism concerning good and evil, ascension and fall, life and death, glory and terror. In the case of Halswelle and Maclise, Ophelia's light imparts a sensation of a holy or sacred figure. Her comparison with the figure of Archangel Gabriel is valid due to the intense contrast she displays in the scene. Ophelia in those paintings demands the viewer's attention, being the point of reference to all other interpretative relations in the images.

The feminist critic Lee R. Edwards (1979, p. 36) points out that "it is impossible to reconstruct Ophelia's biography from the text: we can imagine Hamlet's story without Ophelia, but Ophelia literally has no story without Hamlet". However, in Maclise's and Halswelle's paintings we can construct a narrative of Ophelia without Hamlet, but the opposite, contrary to what Edwards states, in this visual case, maybe not be true. Ophelia undoubtedly is highlighted in comparison with the other characters in the representation. Her vivid contrast of light in a scene full of darkness makes her a monumental character. Although exaggerated, it is the illumination that increases the sense of realism in the scene, making her facial expressions more evident and emphasizing the movement of the characters.

The inspiration to Ophelia's visual representation as a pure and naïve woman may have had its origins in the early seventeenth century. Mary Floyd Wilson (1992, p. 402) argues that the British playwright William Davenant modified some parts of the original text in order to transform Hamlet into the ideal hero and Ophelia into the ideal woman. According to Floyd-Wilson, Davenant, led by the didacticism of the period, excluded the "improper" dialogues. Consequently, Ophelia became represented as an innocent woman, with no consciousness of her sexuality[2] and with no expressiveness of her

[2] This article uses the terms "sexuality" and "sensuality". According to Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, "sexuality" refers to "the quality or state of being sexual; the condition of having sex; sexual activity". And "sensuality" relates to or consists "in the gratification of the senses or the indulgence of appetite; sensory, devoted to or preoccupied with the senses or appetites".

own. Consequently, those modifications in the play text were reflected in the visual arts as well.

Ophelia in Victorian England gained greater expressiveness in literature, on the stage, and in iconography. Georgianna Ziegler (1997, p. 11), in *Queen Victoria, Shakespeare, and the Ideal Woman*, explains that it "was not an accident that Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901) corresponds with the heightened cult of womanhood which revealed itself in a focus on the heroines of that other idol of the period, Shakespeare". This "cultural phenomenon" encouraged girls and women to read Shakespeare, as well as books and essays about his heroines. According to Ziegler, this happens for two reasons: first to improve women's minds, and second to improve their character.

Thus, in order to "educate women", editions of Shakespeare's plays were produced especially to "chaste ears". The representation of Ophelia in Shakespeare's "chaste editions" and "domesticated texts" moralized the original texts making them "proper" for female readers and bourgeois families. Shakespeare's drama in the Victorian period was transformed into a model of virtue, and one of the methods to achieve this was to control the depiction of moral issues in the plays. Cristiane Smith (2007, p. 51) explains that in order to keep Shakespeare's texts in the service of the moralizing purposes of the period, a sanitization occurs, purging characteristics that were considered improper and obscene.

The version of the Bowdler Brothers, titled *Family Shakespeare* (1807), and the version of the Lamb Brothers, called *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807), for instance, were the most famous of the sanitized editions. In the preface of their edition, Charles and Mary Lamb explain the reasons for modification in the texts. In the explanation, the differentiation between male and female education becomes clear; the authors emphasize the incapability of females to comprehend the original text without male guidance:

> For young ladies too, it has been the intention to write; because boys being generally permitted the use of their father's libraries at a much earlier age than girls are, they frequently have the best scenes of Shakespeare by heart, before their sisters are permitted to look into this manly book; and, therefore, instead of recommending these Tales to the perusal of young gentlemen who can read them so much better in the originals, their kind assistance is rather requested in explaining to their sisters such parts that are hardest for them to understand: and when they have helped them to get over the difficulties, then perhaps they will read to them (carefully selecting what is proper for a young sister's ear) some passages which have pleased them in one of these stories. (LAMB, 1994, p. vii)

The differentiation of gender justified by the Lamb brothers has nothing to do with male or female intellectual capacity, but with the domestication of Victorian girls. After all, Mary Lamb and Henrietta Bowdler were females; both read the original texts and understood them so well that were able to decide what should be purged.

Ophelia in these purged texts is represented as a fragile, modest and kind young woman, all qualities considered ideals to be followed by Victorian girls. The representation of Ophelia in these versions extends beyond the fictional dimension to become an implicit pedagogic discourse. Smith (2007, p. 89) rightly argues that Ophelia was appropriated and framed to fit Victorian homes, becoming a symbolic figure that reflects the culture of that time.

Observing visual images of Ophelia before madness, we notice that the Victorian tradition and culture is present in the visual artists' work of the period. Most of the iconography used to represent Ophelia before madness and discussed in this article is inspired in sanitized versions of the play. After all, as see have seen, great part of the original construction of Ophelia's character favors her visual representation with characteristics of an ideal woman of Victorian time. However, even with the "cultural agenda" of the nineteenth century, some of the artists stayed true to their interpretation of the original text, providing readings of Ophelia "not suitable" for Victorian homes.

In Act 2 scene 1, in which Ophelia narrates her non-staged encounter with Hamlet in the sewing room, some of those Victorian characteristics can be recognized. It may seem ironic that Ophelia, a supposedly secondary character who struggles to gain voice in the play, and whose death scene – the one she is usually remembered for in the visual arts – is narrated by someone else, is the character who provides the audience with the first description of the prince's mental stress. This is an important scene in the play, in which we can first observe the effects of the Ghost's revelations upon Hamlet's psyche.

In this appearance, Ophelia tells Polonius that she was interrupted by Hamlet's arrival in her closet while she was sewing. Ophelia explains that Hamlet broke the decorum of dress and held her by the wrist. He stared at her face along the length of his arm, while holding his other hand to his brow. He said nothing, but after a pitiful sigh, he left the room, without ever taking his eyes from her. Ophelia seems frightened by Hamlet's strange behavior and, as a "good daughter", runs to her father and recounts what happened.

The scene provides us with two possible visual representations: one is the depiction of the moment when Ophelia talks to Polonius about her encounter with the prince; and the other is actually her description of the encounter with Hamlet. From the few reported visual representations, this

research has found only two depictions of the scene; both display Ophelia's description of Hamlet's behavior to Polonius. The two images are different in terms of composition and interpretation. Interestingly, the textual scene itself can lead us in two paths, one that shows us a damsel and the other a woman and her sexuality.

The first image of act 2 scene 1 to be analyzed shows Ophelia's obedient behavior, and can be related to some characteristics explored by the Victorian period. In this image, we can assume an interpretation in which Ophelia's devotion and full trust in her father lead her first reaction, as a "good daughter", to run to Polonius and tell the occurred situation. Ophelia's honesty and benevolence towards Hamlet are demonstrated in her description of the scene, when she leaves no indecorous detail hidden from her father. Ophelia tells Polonius about Hamlet's indecent garb and his awkward manners. She comes to her father to report what has happened to her, and to seek guidance about what to do. Ophelia demonstrates her obedient condition, letting her father decide what is best for her in that situation.

Figure 12: Eugène Delacroix. *Reproches d'Hamlet à Ophélie*, 1840.
Source: Louvre Museum, Paris.

The picture above (Figure 12) is a painting by Eugene Delacroix. Delacroix was not at all unfamiliar with subjects from Shakespeare's dramaturgy. The artist depicted scenes from several plays of the Bard, but no play received more of his attention than *Hamlet*, Ophelia being one of his favorite subjects. Delacroix produced a series of lithographs of the play that were influenced by a Paris performance of *Hamlet* in 1827. The painting *Reproches d'Hamlet à Ophélie* was first conceived as a lithograph,[3] and then reworked into painting by Delacroix in 1840. The representation focuses on the two characters' expressions and body language. The scenario is simple, with no ornaments, containing only a window, a chair and a door. Although the window in the room is open, the light seems to be scenic; it does not come naturally in diagonal, as if it were coming from the outside. However, it seems that Hamlet and Ophelia have their own spots of light. This might be a reference to the theater.

In the scene, Hamlet is standing next to Ophelia. His body posture suggests that he is leaving the room. Hamlet's right side is facing the door, but his left side and head are turned in the opposite direction towards Ophelia. He is wearing dark clothes and has his left arm extended to Ophelia with an open hand. The pose suggests that Hamlet is ordering her to stay in her place, or saying good-bye to her. His facial expression can be better interpreted along Ophelia's expression. While Hamlet gazes at Ophelia, she is sitting in a chair, wearing a white gown, and looking away. We cannot identify if she has her eyes closed or if she is staring at the floor. Either way, she appears to be in a submissive position in relation to the prince.

Ophelia is a character taken by submissive behavior in the play. She is surrounded by men who hold power over her life: Polonius, her father; Laertes, her brother; and Hamlet, her beloved. Although in this particular scene we can only observe her submissiveness to Hamlet visually, the original text is full of indications of submissiveness to the three men in her life. This characteristic in relation to Ophelia in the text may have influenced artists in their visual characterization, regardless of the scene portrayed; after all, the theme of submissiveness is one of the recurrent issues in the play.

From the beginning of the play, the issue of men's power is present. Ophelia's first appearance, in act 1 scene 2 (no representations found), shows her condition of being a woman with no power over her life. In the scene, her brother and father make decisions for her. Laertes warns Ophelia about Hamlet's seduction attempts, and Polonius, as her father, strongly forbids Ophelia to accept any kind of affection from the prince. Although in her

[3] The exact date is unknown.

rebuttal of Laertes' advice (1.3), Ophelia can be interpreted as a woman with "knowledge of life", she demonstrates obedience, promising to follow her brother's guidance and her father's command. Ultimately, Ophelia is a submissive daughter, sister and lover, as apparent in Delacroix's image.

Meire Lisboa Santos Gonçalves (2011, p.10), in *A Mulher Ofélia – Um Contraste entre o Natural e o Social*, proposes that Ophelia's submissiveness is a reflection of social principles in Shakespeare's time. The author suggests that the social roles played by men and women are not behaviors determined only biologically but also influenced by changing cultural patterns. Gonçalves (2011, p.11) affirms that regarding the construction of Ophelia, from the beginning of the play the conflict between the exterior mask, socially constructed, and the repressed inner self of the character is evident.

Although Ophelia, in the eyes of Laertes and Polonius, is a damsel, some parts of the text, even before the madness scene with its sexually explicit songs, provoke some questioning. Despite the obedient and submissive attitude, Ophelia gives us brief glimpses of ambiguity and doubts in her lines before madness. For example, the non-staged encounter with Hamlet in the sewing room, where she sees the prince in intimacy. Thus, the same scene that we interpreted as being an act of obedience and trust of Ophelia in her father can be interpreted as an allusion to a pre-existent sexual intimacy between Ophelia and Hamlet. Anna Camati, in "Questões de gênero e sexualidade na época e obra de Shakespeare" (2014) is emphatic in affirming that Ophelia's sexual desire towards Hamlet is oppressed by her father and brother:

> A intimidação sexual de Ofélia já se evidencia na terceira cena do primeiro ato: vemos como ela é sugestionada para submeter-se às regras do patriarcado, manipulada por ambos, seu pai e seu irmão, que lhe ordenam a não confiar em seus sentimentos e desejos. A fragmentação de sua mente é o resultado de atitudes e mensagens contraditórias que ela não consegue conciliar: ela é usada e confundida por todos os homens de seu convívio, seu pai, seu irmão, o rei Cláudio e o próprio Hamlet. Laertes tenciona colocá-la num pedestal como um objeto estético, encarnando seu ideal de castidade feminina; Polônio objetiva transformá-la num completo autômato, sempre pronta para obedecer às suas ordens, uma mercadoria a ser negociada em proveito próprio [...]. Ela não tem autonomia de escolha, pensamento e ação, e todos se mostram completamente alheios às suas necessidades e desejos. (CAMATI, 2014, p. 106)

Therefore, double interpretations of the play exist, and Ophelia is a character surrounded by ambiguities. Visual representations of the play are an independent form of art that expresses its own meanings, being interpreted by the viewer without the necessity of knowing the text. However, it cannot be ignored that interpretations come from textual reverberations that were processed and reinterpreted by visual artists – from their own perspectives and personal readings. Previously, the image of Delacroix and his representation of the sewing room showed us an interpretation of Ophelia as the obedient and submissive maiden, an interpretation completely different from the next artist and image to be presented.

The image in question is the earliest, and probably the most unusual, of the "sewing room" scene. The drawing by Henry Fuseli (1775-6), challenges Ophelia's image as a damsel (Figure 13). It is not clear if the artist was inspired just by the individual scene to create his work, or if his understanding of the whole play influenced him**.** The daring representation shows Hamlet as a naked figure, about to leave through a door. He extends his right hand to Ophelia, while he leans his head on his right shoulder. His body language indicates that he is leaving the room, in a slow motion movement, but Hamlet stares at Ophelia, almost as if he was asking for help or saying good-bye. It is difficult to read his facial expression, which oscillates between insane and languid.

Figure 13: Henry Fuseli. *Hamlet, act II, scene 1. Ophelia and Hamlet*, 1775-76.

Ophelia is wearing a white gown, as we have seen, but here her hair is done. She rests her elbow upon a kind of shelf beside her, and her chin is upon her hand as she leans forward gazing intently at Hamlet. Curiously, her expression does not match with the disturbed description of the scene. She does not seem scared or worried about Hamlet. Her face is depicted as blank of emotions. The light of the picture falls diagonally illuminating Hamlet, with special focus on his facial expression and on Ophelia's profile.

Fuseli challenges the viewer with unusual references in his drawing. The postures of Ophelia and Hamlet do not correspond exactly to those textually described in the scene, but there references to some details and to the tone of the scene as a whole. Fuseli uses the episode reported as basis for his visual treatment. The composition alludes to a decorated Etruscan vase from classical antiquity (Figure 14), even if in the vase it is the female who seems to be leaving. Fuseli's extensive study of Renaissance art brings another feature to his paintings. Stuart Sillars (2006, p. 102), in *Painting Shakespeare: The Artist as Critic, 1720–1820,* comments that in Fuseli's work the "use of iconographical reference is not simply to follow a convention of depiction but to generate meaning through the equation between an element's signification in its original context and that which it conveys in its new setting".

Figure 14: Etruscan Vase. *Satyr and Maenad*, date unknown.
Source: Reproduced from Stuart Sillar's book.

Fuseli is his earlier works, one of them being the "sewing scene", uses a radical exploration of textual ideas through an idiosyncratic use of iconographic reference. The Etruscan vase referenced by Fuseli shows a Satyr entreating a dancing Maenad who moves away from him with outstretched hand and gracefully arched body; according to Sillars (2006, p.107), the scene records "part of a Grecian feast where 'lamentations made an essential part of devotion'". Fuseli takes as reference the image but makes some modifications on it. As has been observed, the artist reverses the gender of the characters in the image: Hamlet is the one with the outstretched arms moving away, i.e., the Maenad; and Ophelia is the one leaning and dispirited, i.e., the satyr.

The depth of reading in this image is not only rare in late eighteenth-century painting, but of a quality rarely approached elsewhere in Fuseli's own work, as it moves towards a greater public acceptance. Although the image in question is slightly different from other representations of Ophelia before madness, it is important to register its existence. This is one of the few images before Ophelia's madness that explores her sexuality or at least intends to. Fuseli's representation of act 2 scene 1 leads us in a complex relation between Ophelia and Hamlet. His work suggests a sexual intensity in the scene.

This interpretation is much stronger when related to the original source of inspiration. Ophelia is related with the image of a Satyr, minor divinities who lived in the fields and woods and who had frequent sexual relations with nymphs, especially Maenads. Although the body position of Ophelia and the that of the Satyr are slightly different, Fuseli's reference is recognized in her facial expression and in the whole composition of the classical image. When Fuseli chooses this pagan image as reference and reverses the gender of the characters, the painter is making a statement about the play. After all, his interpretation of Ophelia is inspired on a mythological creature that has its history always connected with sexuality and lust.

Satyrs in art's history have been portrayed in many forms, but invariably connected with sexuality. In Antiquity they were seen in scenes with nymphs, who were constantly repelling them from unwanted amorous advances; in the Middles Ages they were portrayed as symbols of Satan, because of their lasciviousness; and in the nineteenth century they provided a classical pretext which allowed sexual depictions of them to be seen as objects of high art rather than mere pornography (SCOBEY, 2002, p.43-63). Fuseli's use of a Satyr, this iconic being full of signification, demonstrates his views of some of Ophelia's ambiguities in the text.

However, it is not only his inspiration on the earlier picture that suggests a seductive interpretation of Ophelia. Other characteristics in his

drawing can also suggest his thoughts about her sexuality in the play. Thus, besides Fuseli's references to Antiquity, we may also observe some similarities connected with Fuseli's own period. Ophelia's depiction, especially her head and face, can be compared with French women of the time (Figures 14, 15 and 16). Although her clothes indicate a classical period, her hair and jewelry can refer to eighteenth-century France. The period depicted by Fuseli corresponds to Louis XV's reign in France, highly unpopular, among other reasons, for his sexual excesses. The female model of France at the time was Marie Antoinette, Louis XV's wife, known for her naivety and alienated life in Versailles. She was accused of squandering and of being promiscuous.

Thus, once more in Fuseli's image there is evidence that relates Ophelia to the image of sensuality. In the case of the two characters, the Satyr, and Marie Antoinette, the comparison seems to go beyond sexuality or desire but rather lust, since the chosen characters are related to this thematic axis. Fuseli seems to have a clear interpretation about Hamlet and Ophelia's relationship, leaving no doubt that in the artist's view the two characters were sexually involved.



Figure 14: Marie-Gabrielle Capet. *Self-portrait*, 1783. **/** Figure 15: Jean-Baptiste Gautier Dagoty. *Marie Antoinette, Queen of France*, 1775. / Figure 16: Henry Fuseli. *Hamlet, act II, scene 1. Ophelia and Hamlet*, 1775-76. (Detail)

Given Fuseli's references and allusions, we can conclude that the painter points to a direction of interpreting Ophelia as a woman cognizant of her sexual desire. The image delivers a sense of malicious behavior long before the bawdy songs she sings in her mental distress. Ophelia's relaxed body, her hand touching her sex, the hero's nudity, are Fuseli's critical statements. He employs classical iconographic references in an original perspective system to

clarify in his inventions his reading of the play. Sillars (2006, p.109) comments that the artist "is using what he needs of Neo-Classical tradition allusion, but adapting it to suggestively complicate critical aporia with a sensitivity that far out measures other contemporary criticism". Moreover, Ophelia is recognized either as innocent maiden or a sinner, either way, being most often realized as a fragile and powerless maiden with few words beyond "I shall obey, my lord" (1.3.19). She has become the embodiment of the virgin/promiscuous dichotomy, rarely imaged as a woman in control of her own choices before the madness scene.

Before Ophelia's madness, one of the most iconic moments is the "Nunnery scene". This scene contains one of the most thought-provoking dialogues between Ophelia and her beloved Hamlet. The scene takes place after her non-staged meeting with the prince in the sewing room. After Ophelia tells her father what happened, Polonius, in turn, tells the king and queen about the odd behavior of the prince and asserts that the reason is Hamlet's love for Ophelia. To prove his assumption, Polonius reads the love letters Hamlet wrote to Ophelia to the King and the Queen. Polonius and the King decide to use Ophelia as a bait to sound the reasons of Hamlet's madness.

The "nunnery scene" in act 3 scene 1, before Ophelia's madness, displays the highest number of pictorial representations. From the fourteen pictorial images found of the "nunnery scene", nine are from the second half of the nineteenth century; one is from the earlier twentieth-century, and the date of three of them could not be found. Yet, analyzing their styles and the artists' ages, we can assume that they belong to that period as well. The iconography and interpretation of the scenes found follow similar paths: depicting Ophelia as the obedient maiden. Despite the intense and intriguing dialogue between Hamlet and Ophelia in the scene, none of the artists seems to explore the couple's sexual ambiguities, as in Fuseli's work; instead, they focus on Ophelia's dilemma of obedience and love versus the deceived prince.

The "nunnery scene" can be considered one of the highlights of the play. After all, although we know from previous dialogues that there is a relationship between Ophelia and Hamlet, this is the first time when the audience can see the romantic couple interact and meet on stage. As mentioned before, we know that in the "sewing-room scene" they were together, but this moment is narrated by Ophelia, not staged. Most importantly, this scene is also the first one to provide single images of Ophelia.


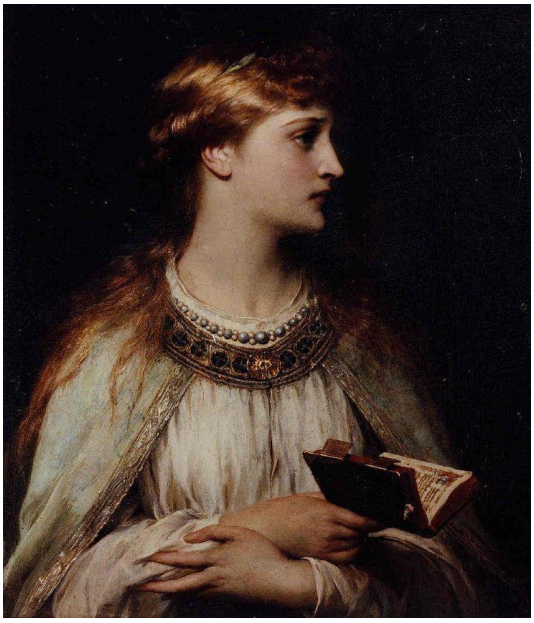

Figure 17: Thomas Francis Dicksee. *Ophelia*, 1864. Figure 18: Thomas Francis Dicksee. *Unfortunate Ophelia*, 1861.

The artist Thomas Francis Dicksee (Figures 17 and 18) painted two portraits of Ophelia in the nunnery scene. He was not the first artist to paint a portrait of Ophelia, but was one of the few who portrayed Ophelia before the madness scene, by herself, and not in a group. Dicksee shows an Ophelia with no emotions and sad eyes. He aproaches the image of Ophelia from a perpective that we can relate to the aforementioned angelical iconography. In both of Dicksee's images, Ophelia wears a white dress with a cape, which suggests wings, and she has golden long and loose hair. Her arms are almost folded near her waist and her hands touch each other gently. In both images the artist depicts Ophelia in profile, holding a book. The book is the key feature to indicate to the viewer that it is the scene before the arrival of Hamlet, when Polonius instructs Ophelia to pretend to be reading a book, or praying; according to him, the action would indicate to Hamlet that she is alone, concentrated on her reading.

Polonius and the King, who in several productions hide behind tapestries, observe Ophelia's encounter with Hamlet. Ophelia does not seem natural, knowing that the meeting is, after all, a trap for the prince. Up to this point in the play she does not trust her feelings, as she remains under the controlling eye of her father. She is a character divided between loyalty to the

father and the desire to follow the intimations of her heart. The images of Dicksee depict Ophelia with a sad expression; her anguish is felt in the attempts to return Hamlet's present, since she is forced by her father to do so. However, Hamlet seems to realize that it is a trap and denies that he has given her gifts. The prince asks questions, challenging Ophelia:

> Ophelia: My lord, I have remembrances of yours
> That I have longed long to redeliver.
> I pray you now receive them.
> Hamlet: No, not I. I never gave you aught.
> (3.1.92-95)
>
> .....
>
> Hamlet: Ha! Ha! Are you honest?
> Ophelia: My lord?
> Hamlet: Are you fair?
> Ophelia: What means your lordship?
> Hamlet: What if you be honest and fair you should admit
> No discourse to your beauty.
> (3.1.102-105)

Hamlet seems shaken up with the idea of being manipulated by Ophelia. Their dialogue becomes harsh. In the text, the prince attempts to have Ophelia confess the truth to him; but his attempt is useless, and the maiden keeps faithful to her father's orders. Hamlet sends Ophelia to a nunnery, a pun with two meanings: convent and brothel. One interpretation is that Hamlet projects his view of his mother on all females. After his mother's remarriage, Hamlet sees her as a prostitute. According to him, Gertrude was unable to remain loyal to the deceased King Hamlet, her late husband. After this event, the prince lost his faith in all women, treating Ophelia as if she were dishonest, and a prostitute. Hamlet's famous lines "sending" Ophelia to a nunnery:

> Hamlet: Get thee to a nunnery! Why wouldst thou be a
> breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest but
> yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better
> my mother had not born me. I am very proud,
> revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck
> than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give
> them shape, or time to act them in. What should such

> fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves – believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. Where's your father?
> Ophelia: At home, my lord. (3.1.120-130)

From the pictorial representations printed below (Figures 19 and 20), some of the characteristics mentioned in the original text can be observed. The images by Agnes Pringles and G. Demain Hammond, both dates unknown, show Hamlet's contempt for Ophelia. His expression is disdainful; in the two images the prince turns his back to her, as if he does not care for or does not believe in her. Ophelia in Pringles' painting exhibits the angelic damsel appearance; she looks desperate and begging for Hamlet's attention. Despite the theme is the same, in Hammond's painting Ophelia seems to be inspired on some middle-aged noble woman. The female character looks almost catatonic, her gaze is fixed and without expression, as if she were present and absent at the same time, perhaps a way of sustaining the situation in which she is forced to be.

Figure 19: Agnes Pringle. *Hamlet and Ophelia*, date unknown.

Figure 20: G. Demain Hammond.
The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons / Be all my sins remember'd, date unkown.

The analysis of Ophelia's images before madness shows that the character is understood in different ways by artists; however, some issues involving Ophelia seem to gain special prominence among them. In the artists' pictorial representations discussed in this article, issues such as submissiveness, obedience, patriarchy and naivety gained prominence. The issues involving Ophelia's sexuality are also represented, as in Fuseli's painting; however, concerning the collected corpus, this is not an issue highlighted among the majority of artists.

Although the text provides many interpretations about the sexual issues between Hamlet and Ophelia in the dialogues before the madness scene, most of the images do not seem to explore this theme. Probably one of the reasons for this has to do with the time in which the representations were produced and their respective cultural traditions, most of the paintings were produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

An important characteristic identified in this research is that in the data collected there are no post-twentieth-century pictorial representations of Ophelia before the madness scene. The only exception is an old, low-resolution

postcard depiction of the nunnery scene, dated 1910, found in online surveys. This research has identified many images of Ophelia in contemporary art; however, the research also indicates that such images do not refer to scenes before the character's madness.

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